# MAYOR'S ANNUAL MESSAGE

Astoria, Oregon, January 6, 1908.

TO THE HONORABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMON COUNCIL:—

At the threshold of this, my third and last year as Mayor of Astoria, I desire to congratulate you, and through you, the people of this city, upon the splendid progress made during the year just passed. The prospects for the ensuing year are most promising. While appreciating all these manifestations of material progress the year 1907 will be remembered principally as the year when the City of Astoria advanced to a cleaner, higher position among the cities of the Northwest.

The charge that "Astoria is the toughest town in Oregon" can no longer truthfully be made. About forty years ago, when Astoria was a mere village and the salmon industry first assumed important proportions, most of the fishermen came here from the Sacramento River every Spring, and at the close of each season they were wont to return to California. It was then said, "these strangers, with pockets full of gold, are sure to become the prey to the pit-falls now flourishing in San Francisco; we might as well pluck them first." Thus the "BUSINESS" originated and it grew in importance until most of us came to believe that it was one of Astoria's chief Industries—without which the business and professional world could not prosper, nor the city pay its running expenses.

As the veteran soldier becomes used to the sight of blood and carnage, as the thunder of shot and shell makes him oblivious to the agonizing cries of his maimed comrades, so did we become hardened and it mattered little who fell by the wayside, whose boys and girls were ruined, so long as our own were safe, and our business shared in the profits. Finally the climax was reached, for particulars of which I refer to my special message of March 19th last. It happened to be my misfortune to be Mayor at this time. Had I anticipated such a dilemma I might well have hesitated to accept the office; many of the men engaged in dance halls and gambling had treated me most generally, none had done me harm and it was a nerve-racking trial to proceed against them, but we are creatures of destiny and must meet difficulties as best we can. I would not be a putty Mayor; finding myself on the firing line it was necessary to either shoot or run. I could not honorably run—even as father and son, brother and friend, had to oppose each other in the Civil War for a PRINCIPLE. Hardly had one question been settled, when last August the District Attorney of this district, like the District Attorneys in most other Oregon districts, and they, like the Prosecuting Attorneys in other states, were forced by an over-whelming public opinion to stop wide open, indiscriminate gambling. This city, however, had become so accustomed to depending for part of its revenues upon these sources, that the loss of it seemed to many a calamity. Yet the earth has continued to revolve, the sun has not ceased to shine, and the City of Astoria still lives, an independent, prosperous municipality.

The tax levy for the coming year has been fixed, and while the obsolete methods of undervaluing property may give the stranger the false impression that taxes are high, our people will not, in fact, be called upon to pay as high a tax per capita will be paid by the people of many other cities in Oregon and Washington, nor as high as Astorians have paid in years gone by, as is exemplified by the following statement procured after considerable research. In answer to inquiries addressed to the Mayors of the principal cities in the two states I received these replies:—

| CITY | EST. POP. | DIRECT TAXES (Excl. License) | PER CAPITA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Astoria, Ore. | 15,000 | $37,411.12 | $2.50 |
| Eugene, Ore. | 5,000 | 35,000.00 | 7.00 |
| Albany, Ore. | 5,000 | 18,289.53 | 3.60 |
| Salem, Ore. | 15,000 | 30,036.90 | 2.00 |
| Portland, Ore. | 200,000 | 912,670.90 | 4.56 |
| Aberdeen, W. | 10,000 | 58,000.00 | 5.80 |
| Everett, W. | 25,000 | 108,538.34 | 4.35 |
| Seattle, W. | 200,000 | 1,100,904.96 | 5.50 |
| WallaWalla, | 20,000 | 75,070.16 | 3.75 |

I also find that the running expenses of the whole city are but little more than the expenses of the Astoria school district, as shown by the report of the school clerk The total running expenses of the City of Astoria last year (exclusive of street improvements and other special charges) were $65,019.29. The total expenses of the school district last year were $62,324.83.

Everybody concedes that the Astoria School District is being managed with prudence and ability: yet who will suggest that the Honorable School Board get part of its revenue from dance halls

and gambling? If it were wrong for the School Directors to secure revenue from fines imposed upon vice, why should decent taxpayers expect the Common Council to do this wicked thing?

I also submit figures taken from the records showing the amount of taxes paid by the people of Astoria (independent of the county and school taxes) during the last four years when the city itself collected its taxes:—

CITY TAXES

| | |
|---|---|
| 1890 | $22,147.06 |
| 1891 | $51,381.73 |
| 1892 | $98,744.45 |
| 1893 | $35,902.31 |

The city taxes levied for next year amount to only $37,451.12. This in face of the fact that we have doubled in population, now have more fire and police protection, are assisting the Park and Library Funds, have more and better streets and about three times the number of street lights. Is there, then, just cause to say that the people of Astoria will have to pay burdensome taxes because of the loss of revenue from illicit sources?

However, if a low tax levy be our only goal, if Astoria ever becomes so impoverished as to be obliged to sell her reputation and be called "The Outcast City," if a low tax levy seems of more importance than the city's good name or the virtue of our children—then I submit that the $15,000 received annually as "blood money" is too small a sum. If the wages of sin is death, then let us strike for the highest possible wages—the traffic will bear it. I am prepared to show that there is enough money in the "Business" to pay the entire running expenses of the city, take up our bonded indebtedness, and still leave a good margin to those who managed the unlawful enterprise.

The police records for last year show that there were

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|---|---|---|
| 15 | cigar machines; estimated daily receipts, each $2.50 total | $ 37.50 |
| 110 | nickel-in-the-slot machines; estimated daily receipts, each, $5.00, total | 550.00 |
| 40 | wheels, tables and other devices; estimated daily receipts, each, $10.00, total | 400.00 |
| Estimated total per day | | $ 987.50 |
| Total per year (365 days) | | $350,000 |
| "Taken In" at dance halls (approximately) | | 50,000 |
| Grand total | | $400,000 |

This is a conservative figure, as all well know. The vast amount of close to half a million dollars spent annually in riotous living! Isn't this appalling? The same money turned into legitimate channels cannot fail to greatly benefit this community. Another very bad feature has been the fact that a large proportion of this vast sum was taken away from here by the swarm of non-residents who, like birds of prey, used to come here in the Spring, leaving the town soon after the season was over with fat pocketbooks: and then, too, like the Great Captains of Monopoly, the "Interests" have made themselves obnoxious to the people by combining and attempting to dictate politics and policies to the Municipality. The greatest danger to any building is not the ravages of the elements from without, but the worms that silently, steadily, surely (working unseen) undermine the structure; so the greatest danger to the social fabric are the vices that gnaw at the vitals, endangering the Home, the foundation of all society and of all good government. In this connection I am tempted to quote two lines from Goldsmith's "Deserted Village":—

> "Ill fares the Land, to hastening ills a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

I say these things, not with bitterness in my heart, but rather with sorrow; I inveigh not against men but against the system. If Jones & Brown had not engaged in it, then White & Black would. The system made easy fortunes possible and it was thought that one set of men might as well make them as another. It took more courage for those men to conduct such enterprises in the face of a hostile public opinion than to go against the laws of Nature and of the State, than for us, the rest of the people, to take revenue from them and then scorn them and vilify the officers of the law for doing their sworn duty. I am conscious of the fact that it hurts some while a change is being enforced in the established habits of a community. A cancer cannot be removed without causing pain, but is it better to let the cancer grow until relief is impossible? Something had to be done! It has been done, and now let us from this day on forget it, and turn our attention to other things.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Fire Department has been enlarged by the addition of one hose company but my recommendation made last year and the year previous concerning the repair of the two steam fire engines owned by the city have evidently carried no weight. The two engines still lay as so much junk. I pray that a general conflagration may never visit Astoria and wipe out the buildings of many years, but if ever the fire fiend does come, and, burning the wooden streets, causes the water mains to break, (as they did in San Francisco,) a couple of steam engines would pump water out of the bay which in such an emergency would seem like golden showers. I therefore again and most respectfully urge the committee on Fire and Water to restore the engines to usefulness.

WEST END FIRE COMPANY

The increase in the number of residences and manufacturing plants in West Astoria, makes the establishment of a fire company there imperative; such a company would also be a great help to the whole city in times of stress.

WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENT

First impressions may not always be the best and strangers do not always remain long enough to have that impression obliterated. But that the first impression a visitor receives as he comes into this city by rail or by steamer? Debris of all sorts is littered along the city's water-front, and it seems to me that if the council can order a street improved when it becomes dangerous it may also find a way to remove dangerous material along the water-front. In its present condition life and property are both endangered. Pedestrians may easily stumble over into the water, and fires originate midst the piles of rotted timber and miscellaneous rubbish along the water-front. Let the Council pass a resolution declaring its intention of improving the water-front by clearing, and in the near future, pass an ordinance advertising for bids for said improvement, give the work to the lowest and best bidder, and assess the cost to the adjacent property, as is done in all other cases. In this way the Council will endear itself to the vast majority of the people and bring about the best improvement it has made in years.

CITY PARK

The Park Commission this year completed a fine driveway around the Sand Stand Knoll; they have also caused said knoll to be cleared of dead timber, and upon the brow thereof rows of shade trees have been planted, which trees have been donated by Florist Erickson; the good ladies of the Woman's Club have erected a beautiful drinking fountain at the entrance of the park, and the honorable Water Commission has furnished free water. I hereby on behalf of the people publicly extend thanks to the Woman's Club, and to Mr. Erickson and to the Water Commission for their kindness. Would that some wealthy person, with the proper public spirit, might see their way clear to emulate the example set by people in other cities and offer a subscription or endowment to the park; there is much to be done and little to do it with. No city anywhere has a more beautiful park site.

NEW BUILDINGS

While not strictly within the bounds of municipal improvement I can not forego the pleasure of expressing a certain degree of pride in the starting of a modern hotel; no city can make much progress unless it has an an abode where men with means, who enjoy the comforts of life they are accustomed to, would like to stay long enough to learn something of Astoria's advantages. I also take pride in acquainting the world with the fact that Astoria has just completed the most modern and most beautiful county court house in Oregon.

LIQUOR LICENSES

I submit for the consideration of your Honorable Body the advisability of passing an ordinance which will either limit the number of liquor licenses, or else limit the territory where saloons may be established; safety lies between the two extremes—unlimited licenses on the one hand, total prohibition on the other. An additional preventative against a general application of the Local Option Law, would be the abolition of private boxes in the rear of saloons in the business district; such saloon boxes are frequently used for immoral purposes. It is unfair to make the decent saloon-keeper share in the blame attached to wrongdoers in the business; there are good and bad men in every line of trade.

NICKLE-IN-THE-SLOT MACHINES

You are to be congratulated for having repealed the ordinance to license nickel-in-the-slot machines. Said ordinance was against the Oregon Statutes, contrary to the requirements of our city charter, and wrong in principle.

STREET IMPROVEMENTS

The system of street improvements planned by this Council is of paramount importance. Among the 32 improvements there are two to which I must refer especially:

First—The improvement of Irving Avenue from Ninth to Fortieth Street.

Second—The extension of Commercial Street to Uniontown.

With the Irving Avenue Improvement we add another connecting link between East and West Astoria. No longer will we be in danger of being isolated in case the roadway to the east end of the city burns down, and, besides, the opening of a through street up on the hill makes the residence section more accessible, and offers an inducement for the establishment of an interurban line; for, by being able to run cars from Fort Stevens and Warrenton to the eastern limits of our city, with branches down town, there will be considerable revenue in sight to induce prospective investors to build. I believe that the time is not far distant when Irving Avenue will be extended from Young's Bay to Cathlamet Bay, a project as desirable as it is feasible. That the extension of Commercial Street is also necessary was proven last fall when Bond Street was being repaired: the people of the west end were separated from the rest of the city for weeks, bereft of fire protection and put to many inconveniences. As every artery brings more blood into the human body, so must each connecting link bring more life into the body politic.

While upon the subject of street improvements, I consider it but just to say that the honorable members of the street committee truly deserve the especial commendation of the public: few people have any idea how much time, labor and patience is given by this committee, and no other committee receives so many kicks, mostly unjust censure, from men who judge without investigation.

SUPPLIES

Last year I suggested the advisability of making an estimate and advertising for bids for such supplies as the city uses in large quantities; I therefore renew the suggestion. The proper time to buy hay and oats and coal is not when prices are at the soaring point.

STREET EXCAVATIONS

Ordinance No. 3192, regulating excavating in public throughfares, approved December 5, 1906, provides that before a person or corporation may proceed to dig holes in the streets they must first secure a permit therefor, and, after a reasonable length of time, put the street in a satisfactory condition, as prescribed in the ordinance. The said ordinance also provides a penalty for every violation of the ordinance. I therefore ask that the Superintendant of the Streets make it his business to file complaints against all who fail to get a permit or fail to repair the streets.

LICENSING HOT AIR PEDDLERS

One of the worst forms of swindling in any community is the sale of mining and similar stocks. In the "World's Work," from competent authority, is the statement that less than one per cent of all mining stocks put on the open market will ever return one per cent of the principal invested—let alone bringing dividends. In one single day eighteen new mining stocks appeared on the curb, and the purported value of such stocks was nine hundred millions of dollars. The mines that are worth anything are owned by millionaires who do not send smooth-tongued solicitors from village to village and from house to house. It has been well said that the average mine whose stock is peddled about is "A hole in the ground with a liar on top." Therefore and in consideration of the fact, as I am informed, that a number of Astoria's Easy Marks have been recently victimized by hot air mining artists, I would recommend that an ordinance be passed prohibiting this species of swindle within this city; or, if that conflicts with the Oregon statutes, I would suggest the enactment of an ordinance providing for a license fee of about one hundred dollars per day for these bogus representatives of gold and coal barons, who wish to try their hands at the old and time-worn trick of enriching people by the process of hot air.

GAS FRANCHISE

Now comes another one of those duties that cover an up-to-date Mayor's chair with tacks.

So many people complained to me about the Gas Service in Astoria and have asked whether the City is impotent in the matter, that I felt it incumbent on me to look over the gas franchise and see if the City had reserved any rights at all in the premises, and to my amazement I find that the only excuse for a franchise on record is Ordinance 493, approved December 16, 1882; said ordinance merely gives the Astoria Gas Light Company the right to build gas works and lay gas pipes in the public streets.

In those days, public franchises were considered of little value and were not properly safe-guarded; since that time, however, it has been universally recognized that such privileges were the people's birth-right and to be leased to whomsoever considered them of value under certain restrictions only, and upon the payment of an annual license fee, for the benefit of the tax-payer.

For fully twenty-five years the Astoria Gas Light Company enjoyed all the privileges — without any restrictions whatsoever and without paying a single cent to the city; on the contrary, the city has paid to the company during this quarter of a century, perhaps between $7000.00 and $10,000.00 for using gas in the city hall and fire engine houses.

I have naught but the kindliest feelings toward the Gas Company, but I owe a greater allegiance to the whole people, therefore I have the honor to recommend:

First: That the Ordinance No. 493 be repealed.

Second: That in lieu thereof an ordinance be passed giving to the said Astoria Gas Light Company certain privileges for a limited number of years.

Third: And that in order to oblige the Company to furnish a good quality of gas at rates no higher than is paid in other cities of similar size.

Fourth: Requiring the company to pay to the City an annual license, the same as is being paid by other public service corporations, here and elsewhere.

Fifth: Incorporating a provision for free gas in the City hall and in the fire engine houses now built or hereafter to be built by the City.

These requirements, I submit, are not unreasonable. If the receipts from gas lights are not as large as formerly, it is because it is of much poorer quality, and perhaps used principally as a fender to keep competition off the track. And that is worth something, is it not?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I ask your pardon for this lengthy message—but this has been an eventful year; a year that has seemed to me an age. No one who has never tasted the bitterness of the struggle between Friendship and Duty can quite realize the feeling: still, if, as a result of the intense controversy, but one poor woman has a happier home—if but one child has gained a pair of shoes—if but one boy or girl has been kept from going wrong—our work has not been in vain!

Let me hope that the present year may bring to you, to me, and to everyone within the confines of this City more health, more happiness, and that calm feeling of satisfaction which is the Fruit of Duty well performed.

Respectfully submitted,

HERMAN WISE,

Mayor.

02.072001